

**SCHOOL ACCREDITATION:
AN OVERVIEW**

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"8 State Schools Unaccredited
But in Detroit, Public Ones Pass"

Detroit Free Press, January 12, 1999¹⁾

"State Offers School Accreditation Plan
Improving on MEAP Would Determine Rank"

Detroit Free Press, May 19, 1999²⁾

"State Wants Tougher Accreditation Plan
Emphasis Would Center on Rewarding Schools"

Detroit Free Press, June 7, 1999³⁾

"State Toughens School Standards"

Detroit News, December 9, 1999⁴⁾

A sampling of newspaper headlines indicates the conundrum about Michigan's system of accrediting public schools. On one hand, only eight out of more than 2,500 middle and elementary schools in the State did not reach any level of accreditation in 1998, the third year that the Michigan Department of Education reported the accreditation status of schools across the State. This represented the lowest number of unaccredited schools since the State announced accreditation status for the first time in 1995. At the same time, many students who were attending accredited schools were scoring poorly on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) test. The incongruity between the accreditation status of a school district and the achievement levels of students became apparent when the Legislature enacted legislation overhauling the governance and operation of the Detroit Public Schools--a district where all elementary and middle schools were State-accredited, but where scores on MEAP tests were low. Consequently, questions arose about the effectiveness of the accreditation process and whether it adequately held schools accountable for the academic performance of their students.

In response, the Michigan Department of Education has been developing a new performance-based accreditation process that evaluates the performance of public schools in order to help them improve academic performance. Some members of the State's educational community, however, are concerned that the new process overemphasizes the importance of statewide achievement tests in determining a school's performance.

This paper reviews the State's current statutory accreditation requirements, examines circumstances that led to a revision of the system, reviews the Department of Education's framework for performance-based accreditation, describes reactions from the educational community to the framework, and reviews strategies for change implemented by schools that have a low accreditation status. In addition, the paper reviews a new program of intervention for low-status schools, provides an overview of accreditation policies in other states, and concludes that the Revised School Code's accreditation provisions may have to be revised.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Efforts to reform Michigan's educational system began a decade ago with the enactment of Public Act 25 of 1990, which established in the School Code activities to improve the quality of public education. Specifically, a school board that did not want to forfeit State school aid or that wanted and was eligible to receive additional school funding would have to: make available a model core curriculum that articulated educational outcomes for all students; adopt and implement a school improvement plan and continuing school improvement process that a school could use to bring about change; prepare and make available an annual educational report to inform the public about a school's progress toward improvement; and, be accredited.

Further refinement of the Code's accreditation provisions occurred under Public Acts 335 and 339 of 1993, which added a student performance requirement for accreditation and permitted the summary accreditation of schools, and Public Act 289 of 1995, which overhauled the State's School Code regulations and recodified them in the Revised School Code. In addition, Public Act 230 of 2000 amended the Revised School Code to require the board of a school district, or the board of directors of a public school academy that operates any of grades one to five, to administer each school year to all pupils in grades one to five a nationally recognized norm-referenced test or another assessment, which may include a locally adopted assessment, approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction at the request of the school district or public school academy. A school district or academy may use the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile to assess literacy in grades one to three as part of its compliance with this requirement. If a school is designated to participate in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) program, it must do so. An elementary school that does not comply with the testing requirement or participate in the NAEP program as required cannot be accredited.

A key component of the State's endeavors to improve public education, accreditation was intended to serve as a mechanism to demonstrate that a school had met certain quality standards and to verify that change had occurred.⁵⁾

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

Under the Revised School Code⁶⁾, a school board must ensure that each public school within the district is accredited, or the school will be subject to certain sanctions. To be accredited, a school must be certified by the State Board of Education as having met or exceeded standards of school operation pertaining to: administration and school organization, curricula, staff, school plant and facilities, school and community relations, school improvement plans, and student performance. A building-level evaluation used in the accreditation process must include school data collection, self-study, visitation and validation, determination of performance data, and the development of a school improvement plan. In addition to meeting these requirements, if a school board wants all of its schools to be accredited, the board must: prepare and submit to the State Board of Education an annual education report; adopt and implement annually a three- to five-year school improvement process for each school in the district; and, provide a core academic curriculum based on content standards developed by the State Board. (For a more detailed explanation of these requirements, see Appendix A.)

The Department of Education is required under the Code to develop and distribute to all public schools the standards for accreditation as well as those to determine whether a school is eligible for summary accreditation. Standards for accreditation and summary accreditation

must include pupil performance on the MEAP tests, the State's mandatory academic examinations. (The MEAP test examines students in mathematics and reading in the fourth and seventh grades, and in science, writing, and social studies in the fifth and eighth grades. Students in the 11th grade take the MEAP high school test in mathematics, science, reading, writing, and social studies.) To be summary accredited, a school must answer affirmatively to more than 100 questions on a State survey that covers areas ranging from teacher preparation to curriculum planning. The standards also must include multiple-year change in pupil performance on MEAP and multiple-year change in the percentage of pupils achieving State endorsement.⁷⁾ (For an additional explanation of the accreditation standards, see Appendix B.)

Under the Code, if the Department determines that a public school has met the standards for summary accreditation, the school is accredited without having to undergo a full building-level evaluation. A school is in interim status if the Department determines that it has not met the standards for summary accreditation, but is making progress toward meeting them, or, if based on a full building-level evaluation, the Department determines that the school has not met the accreditation standards, but is making progress toward meeting them. If a school has not met the standards for summary accreditation and is not eligible for interim status, the school is unaccredited.

The Department is required to review and evaluate annually the performance of each unaccredited school and as many of the interim status schools as permitted by the Department's resources. The Department also is required to provide technical assistance to an unaccredited school or an interim status school upon a school board's request. An intermediate school district and/or a consortium of intermediate school districts also may provide this assistance. If requests to the Department for technical assistance exceed capacity, priority is given to unaccredited schools.

According to the Revised School Code, a school that is unaccredited for three consecutive years is subject to one or more of the following sanctions, as determined by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction: 1) The State Superintendent must appoint, at the school district's expense, an administrator of the school until it becomes accredited. 2) A parent, legal guardian, or person in loco parentis of a child who attends the school may send his or her child to any accredited public school with an appropriate grade level within the school district. 3) With the approval of the State Superintendent, the school district must align itself with an existing research-based school improvement model or establish an affiliation for providing assistance to the school with a college or university located in the State. 4) The school must be closed.

The Department also is required under the Code to evaluate the school accreditation program and the status of schools, and submit an annual report based on the evaluation to the Senate and House of Representative committees that are responsible for education legislation. The report must address the reasons why a school is not accredited and must recommend legislative action that will result in the accreditation of all public schools.

ACCREDITATION STATUS OF SCHOOLS

Under the existing accreditation process, schools may be awarded one of four levels of accreditation: summary accredited, interim status, unaccredited, or no status.⁸⁾

Summary Accredited: Indicates that a school is in full compliance with the Revised School Code's accreditation requirements, and on eight of 12 MEAP tests, students scored at 66% or better in the last three consecutive years.

Interim Accreditation: Indicates that the school may/may not comply with all of the Revised School Code accreditation provisions and students scored above 50% in any of the last three consecutive years on at least one MEAP test.

Unaccredited: Indicates that the school may/may not comply with the Code's accreditation provisions and on eight MEAP tests students scored at 50% or below in all of the last three years.

No Status: A school might receive a no status designation because of several factors; for example, the school was a new building and did not have three consecutive years of MEAP scores; the building did not house grades tested by MEAP; or, further departmental input is required.

For accreditation purposes, "satisfactory" or "proficient" is the highest level of achievement on the MEAP test.⁹⁾

In 1995, the State determined accreditation status of schools for the first time. Summary accreditation status was awarded to 163 schools; 2,762 schools received interim accreditation; and, 93 schools were unaccredited. The following year the accreditation status for elementary and middle schools was announced, but high schools were not included due to a change in the high school test. At that time, 260 schools were awarded summary accreditation and the number of unaccredited schools dropped to 39. In 1998, the number of summary schools increased to 304 and eight schools were unaccredited.¹⁰⁾

Under the Revised School Code, the Department of Education is required and intermediate school districts are allowed to provide technical assistance to a school district that is unaccredited or is in interim status. In response to a request from the Department, the Achievement Group was formed to provide assistance to low-status schools. Currently made up of a consortium of intermediate school districts in Genesee, Ingham, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne Counties, the group is funded to serve the Department's field service regions three, four, and five, which cover southeastern Michigan as well as the thumb area and part of central lower Michigan. (Technical assistance also is provided to schools in regions one and two in the northern and western parts of the State through intermediate school districts in those areas.) In the beginning, approximately 200 schools reportedly availed themselves of the assistance. Some of the schools have received assistance for the past three years.¹¹⁾

Since 1995, the State School Aid Act has appropriated up to \$1.5 million annually to the Department of Education to provide this technical assistance. While the amount appropriated for technical assistance has been stagnant for five years, the current School Aid Act (Public Act 297 of 2000) increased the appropriation for technical assistance to \$3 million for fiscal year (FY) 2000-01, \$5 million for FY 2001-02, and \$10 million for FY 2002-03.

In addition, the 1999-2000 budget for the Department of Education included \$3.55 million to fund 44.7 full-time equated positions (FTEs) for standards, assessment, and accreditation operations. A program description issued by the Department of Management and Budget for

FY 1999-2000 indicated that of the 17 funded positions in the Department of Education's School Development Unit, nine were filled and eight were vacant. In addition, of the three classified positions in the School Improvement Outreach Program, one was filled and two were vacant. In fact, Dr. Michael Williamson, Deputy Superintendent for Education Services, explained that of the 44.7 FTEs, only 38 positions were filled. Of those, 20 were assigned to the MEAP office, 10-12 were in early childhood, and three provided management and technical support. Only three were assigned to school improvement efforts.¹²⁾

Under Public Act 263 of 2000, which makes appropriations to the Department of Education for FY 2000-01, approximately \$6.5 million is appropriated to the Office of School Excellence. The office incorporates positions previously assigned to the Department's School Improvement and Professional Development Unit and School Improvement Outreach programs. Out of the approximately 45 FTE positions assigned to the school excellence office under Public Act 263, 10.8 are assigned to early childhood, curriculum, and learning support services, with 8.8 positions filled and two vacant. Positions responsible for student assessment were assigned to the Department of Treasury pursuant to Executive Order No. 1999-12. Positions involving school excellence were transferred to other service areas in the Department of Education under a recent departmental reorganization.¹³⁾

Dr. Williamson expressed doubt about the adequacy of funding and staff allocated in the past to help schools in their work to achieve or improve their accreditation status. Contending that the \$1.5 million that has been allocated to provide technical assistance was not enough to do the job, Dr. Williamson explained that if the funds were divided equally to provide assistance for 200 schools, it would amount to only \$7,500 per school. "You can't fix a school building for \$7,500," he said.¹⁴⁾

FEDERAL TITLE I AND IDEA -- ENGINES OF REFORM

Title 1 of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides funds for schools to improve the learning of students at risk of educational failure. The program addresses the educational challenges facing high-poverty communities by targeting extra financial resources to school districts and schools with the highest concentrations of poverty, where academic performance tends to be low and obstacles to raising performance exist. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Title 1 is linked to state accountability so that states will hold Title 1 schools to the same high performance standards that are expected of all schools. Under Title 1, states are required to develop criteria for determining a standard of adequate yearly progress for Title 1 schools based on a state assessment and other measures. Title 1 schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress are to be identified for improvement and are to receive support and assistance from states and school districts.¹⁵⁾

Under Title 1, participating states are required to adopt challenging content standards and high standards for student performance. The law specifies that these standards must apply equally to Title 1 schools and other schools as well as to Title 1 students and other students. In addition, states are required to adopt and develop student assessments in the same academic areas as their content and performance standards. The assessments must measure the yearly progress of Title 1 students, schools, and districts. States that do not develop their own assessments, which must be in place by 2000-01, must adopt an assessment used by another state that has its Title 1 plan prepared. The assessments must be the same for all children; must align with state content and performance standards; must be valid and

reliable; and, may be adapted to provide for the participation and inclusion of all children, including those who have disabilities or limited English proficiency; are transient; or, are children of migrant agricultural workers. States must be able to report student performance results for each school district and school by gender, racial/ethnic group, disability, and income status.¹⁶⁾

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) aims to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for children with disabilities. Under 1997 amendments to the Act, focus shifted to improving teaching and learning, with emphasis on using the Individualized Education Program (IEP), a plan that spells out the educational goals for each disabled child and the educational services the child will receive, as the primary mechanism for enhancing a child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum. Under the amendments, an IEP must include a statement of a child's present level of educational performance, an explanation of how the child's disability affects his or her progress in the general curriculum, and a statement of measurable annual goals related to meeting the child's needs resulting from the disability to enable him or her to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. The amendments also provide that for a state to be eligible for funding under the Act, children with disabilities must be included in state assessment programs.¹⁷⁾

There is some concern that Title 1 Federal funds could be at risk if Michigan's accreditation program is not improved to meet Title 1 guidelines. Under the FY 2000 allocations from the U.S. Department of Education for the 2000-01 school year, Michigan will receive approximately \$342.7 million in Title 1 grants to local educational agencies, which are intended to help schools implement reforms that will help reduce the educational achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and more advantaged students.¹⁸⁾ This emphasis on accountability for high levels of achievement for all students has contributed to the impetus to redesign Michigan's school accreditation system.

ACCOUNTABILITY-BASED ACCREDITATION

Nearly a decade after Public Act 25 of 1990 laid the foundation for school reform, efforts to improve the quality of public education appeared to be working. The number of unaccredited schools was at an all-time low and the number of schools attaining summary accreditation was increasing. Some people, however, were beginning to question whether the State's accreditation process indeed verified that change had occurred. "Only a handful of schools are unaccredited. But I can assure you there are numerous schools that are failing our children," said Dr. Lindy Buch, Department Supervisor, Curriculum, Birth-Grade 12.¹⁹⁾ Discontent with the system centered on the fact that a school could fall into the interim accreditation category if 50.1% of the students had satisfactory scores on only one test, even if the remaining test scores were low. While efforts were begun to aid academically troubled schools, concern was developing over the significance of schools' earning an interim accreditation--a wide middle ground. "You could be buried in that [accreditation status] and nobody would know whether you were almost summary accredited, just barely in the interim category, or just in between," observed State Board member Dorothy Beardmore.²⁰⁾ Furthermore, there was no incentive for schools with an interim accreditation to boost their low scores, especially since it would take a long jump to reach summary accreditation. "Under the old standards, if a school got one MEAP score in which just over 50% of the kids got a satisfactory score, then that school got a bye forever," Dr. Williamson said, explaining that the school was considered to be accredited, even if it were only an interim accreditation. "The accreditation process does not provide for continuous improvement in student

performance nor does it consider whether a school district's scores are going backwards." Consequently, the current accreditation process does not adequately verify whether change had occurred at a school.²¹⁾

As a result, the staff of the Department of Education has been developing a new system to determine the accreditation of the State's public schools. In a 1999 memorandum to the State Board of Education, State Superintendent Arthur Ellis noted that the new accreditation system would be based on the following principles: Accreditation would support the progress made by the educational community in defining curriculum by establishing expectations for what all students should know and be assessed, and accreditation would hold schools and districts accountable for high levels of achievement, workplace readiness, and certain school improvement accountability factors, such as increases in student attendance, graduation rates, student preparedness when entering kindergarten, the quality of school programs in grades kindergarten to third grade, the quality of classroom teaching and learning, and the number of students assessed.²²⁾

For their part, the State Board and the Department have said that they would be accountable to schools and districts for the following: working toward a single coordinated system that would bring together Federal and State programs to demonstrate achievement of all students; implementing accreditation factors that document student achievement and other measures of school improvement in accordance with Public Act 25 of 1990; increasing technical assistance to schools that are not able to make progress; developing and implementing a professional development plan that focuses on teaching and learning as a means of improving student achievement; identifying and approving resources that provide a quality improvement process that results in evidence of school improvement and increased student achievement; and, providing incentives and rewards for school and district accountability.

In May 1999, the State Board of Education approved a framework for a new performance-based accreditation system founded on the following accountability factors: high academic achievement (student performance on MEAP tests); evidence that the school is committed to all students (i.e., when test results are disaggregated, there is no evidence of an achievement gap and 95% of enrolled students are tested); and, a record of yearly improvement (adequate yearly progress). The framework originally detailed the following accountability measures a school would have to meet to be accredited.

Summary Accredited: At least 75% of students score in the top performance category on MEAP tests; no evidence of an achievement gap when test results are disaggregated; 95% of enrolled students are tested; and, there is evidence of yearly improvement.

Accredited Receiving Recognition: Between 50% and 75% of students score in the top performance category on MEAP tests; no evidence of an achievement gap when test scores are disaggregated; 95% of enrolled students are tested; and, there is evidence of yearly improvement.

Accredited With Moderate Performance: Between 24% and 50% of students score in the top performance category on MEAP tests; no evidence of an achievement gap when test scores are disaggregated; 95% of enrolled students are tested; and, there is evidence of yearly improvement.

Unaccredited But Improving: Fewer than 25% of students score in the top performance category on MEAP tests; no evidence of an achievement gap when test results are disaggregated; 95% of enrolled students are tested; and, there is evidence of yearly improvement.²³⁾

In schools where students demonstrated high academic achievement on the MEAP tests, and consequently the schools would have been eligible for summary accreditation or accreditation receiving recognition, but did not meet the standards concerning an achievement gap, percentage of students tested, and yearly improvement, the schools' accreditation status could be withheld until the schools began to address the needs of all students. In this case, the Department recommended that a school would have to become involved in a "quality-focused approach to school improvement that is data based and involves peer review". Similarly, accreditation status could be withheld from schools that met the academic achievement measure but did not meet the standards for achievement gap, percentage of students tested, or yearly improvement; or, schools that demonstrated high academic achievement and met the percentage of students to be tested, but not the standards on the achievement gap or yearly improvement. Schools placed in this category would have to seek help from their school districts and/or intermediate school districts to write and implement a data-based school improvement plan that included a component addressing the needs of low-achieving students. If a school were characterized as unaccredited and there were no evidence of yearly improvement, the school would have to work with an assigned technical assistance provider to develop and implement a school improvement plan that was data based and involved peer review. Under the framework, if an unaccredited school could not implement a school improvement plan and document evidence of improvement, representatives of the school district plus school and technical assistance providers would have to meet with the State Superintendent to discuss the situation and the application of sanctions.²⁴⁾

Since the State Board approved the framework for a new accreditation system, schools and school districts, as well as educational organizations, have made several recommendations to the Department. For example, the participation target, the yearly progress factor, and the achievement gap have been revised so that schools will be accountable for making progress to close large, significant achievement gaps. Furthermore, Department staff continue to work on developing an accountability-based accreditation system. For example, they have identified and defined accountability factors that will be components of the new accreditation system, as described below.²⁵⁾

Assessment for All Students: Schools will be required to report on at least 80% of their students during the first year of the system's implementation. This percentage will include students who require an alternate assessment, as supported by their IEP, as well as students who do not use English as their primary language and who have been in the United States for less than two years. The percentage of students required to participate will increase in future years. For high schools, participation and achievement will be calculated on the number of high school seniors who took the MEAP high school test by the time they graduated. Schools that do not report the required performance levels will be unaccredited.

(The Department notes that the reporting percentage for the third and subsequent years will allow for long-term illness or absence of students and any student attrition from the September pupil count day to the testing dates. In addition, the Department is implementing a comprehensive plan for alternate assessment of special education students.)

High Academic Achievement: The new accreditation system categorizes academic achievement in four levels: exemplary, high, moderate, and low. Schools in which at least 75% of the students meet or exceed State standards in each MEAP content area will be at the exemplary level. Schools in which students do not meet the exemplary level, but where at least 50% of the students meet or exceed State standards in each content area will be considered at the high level of achievement. Schools in which students do not achieve the high level, but where at least 25% meet or exceed State standards in each content area will be placed at the moderate level of performance. Schools in which fewer than 25% of the students meet or exceed State standards in any content area will be considered to exhibit "low" achievement. Schools that exhibit low achievement will be unaccredited.

(While the content areas to be considered in the accreditation system will vary according to the development of the MEAP tests, initial assessments will be made in reading, mathematics, and science. A writing component will be added with new English language arts tests scheduled for 2002. The Departments of Education and Treasury are to determine which content area tests will be included in the system for a particular year, and the grade levels at which they will be included. Furthermore, in MEAP content areas where there are four classifications of achievement, the top two classifications will be combined when the percentage of students who meet or exceed State standards is determined. In the MEAP content areas with only three levels of achievement, only the top classification will be used to determine the percentage.)

Improvement in Student Performance: Evidence of a school's adequate yearly progress will be calculated according to a procedure approved by the State Board for Title 1 schools. When at least 75% of the students meet or exceed State standards or score in the highest classification for a content area, adequate yearly progress will not be calculated but will be considered met. To receive credit for meeting the accountability factor, a school will have to meet its improvement goals in all content areas where improvement is required according to the Title 1 plan. A school improvement plan for a building will have to address strategies for increasing student achievement.

(Adequate yearly progress is a formula developed in response to Federal legislation that requires states to design a method for measuring progress in Title 1 schools. Under the new accreditation system, a Title 1 school in Michigan will meet the definition of adequate yearly progress if its MEAP results in each subject area tested demonstrate that the school has closed at least 10% of its achievement gap. Thus, adequate yearly progress will be a way of checking that progress is continuing and that students who tested in the middle and low categories on the MEAP test are moving into the high and middle categories.)

Achievement for All Students: Schools will be required to analyze differences in achievement by content area for gender and racial/ethnic groups. Schools may analyze additional group differences depending on their constituents and in conjunction with a local school improvement plan, but there will be a minimum threshold of 10 students in a particular category. Achievement gaps will be calculated by way of a process similar to the adequate yearly progress calculation. To receive credit for meeting the student achievement accountability factor, a school will have to meet the progress goals for the majority of achievement gaps.

School Improvement Results: A self-assessment review and rating of a building-level school improvement plan, in accordance with State Board standards for accreditation, is being developed. Each school will be required to submit the assessment report to the local intermediate school district so it can provide assistance for school improvement. The intermediate districts then will have to submit the information for each school to the Department. To meet this accreditation factor, a school improvement plan will have to include strategies for improving student achievement in performance, yearly progress, and progress in minimizing achievement gaps.

A school's accreditation status will be based on the five accountability factors described above. A school must meet the minimum requirement for each factor to receive the status for that level of accreditation, as noted in Table 1 below. As Department officials explained, a school will have to meet the targets for two factors--participation and achievement level--for an accreditation category or it will be unaccredited. If the targets for these two factors are met, then a school's accreditation status will depend on whether it meets the targets for any of the remaining three factors.

Table 1

ACCREDITATION CATEGORIES				
	Summary Accredited Schools	Schools Accredited with Recognition	Accredited Schools	Unaccredited Schools
Participation	Target met	Target met	Target met	If target is not met, school is <i>"Unaccredited"</i> (due to insufficient data)
Achievement Level	Exemplary	Exemplary or high	High or moderate	If achievement level is poor, the school is <i>"Unaccredited"</i> (due to low student achievement)
3 Remaining Accountability Factors	Meet all 3	Meet 2 of 3	Meet 2 of 3	<i>"Unaccredited"</i> (due to...
Improvement Goals	N/A (considered met)	Targets met all content areas below exemplary level	Targets met for all content areas below exemplary level	...insufficient progress in student achievement--target not met in one or more content areas)
Achievement Gaps	Targets met for majority of identified gaps	Targets met for majority of identified gaps	Targets met for majority of identified gaps	...insufficient progress in closing achievement gaps--target not met for the majority of identified gaps)
School Improvement Self-Assessment	ISD reports compliance with Standards	ISD reports compliance with Standards	ISD reports compliance with Standards	...not demonstrating compliance with the Standards for Accreditation)

Source: Michigan Department of Education

Under the new system, schools will be recognized annually for meeting an accreditation level. All schools will be encouraged to work toward summary accreditation. Schools that meet standards for accreditation with recognition and those that meet minimum accreditation standards will have to address in their school improvement plan the areas needing improvement, with local school districts and intermediate districts expected to assist these schools. Unaccredited schools also will receive State resources for their improvement. Schools that are unaccredited for three consecutive years may be subject to measures outlined in the Revised School Code.²⁶⁾

According to the State Superintendent, the Department staff has worked on data management and definitions under the new system. The plan cannot be implemented immediately, however, because multiple years of data and target-setting are required. Consequently, the Department has proposed the following implementation timetable.

1999-2000: Release of accreditation status based on 1999 MEAP. Schools notified of the format for the new system.

2000-2001: Accreditation status based only on participation and achievement factors is released. Self-assessment of school improvement is implemented. Targets for progress and achievement gap for the next year are set.

2001-2002: The entire system is operational.

Future: Ongoing development and revision of the system.

Department officials believe that the new accreditation system will hold schools to a greater level of accountability, since they no longer will be able to claim an interim accreditation by merely showing satisfactory performance on just one MEAP content area test. "The new system will be based on performance across the curriculum," Dr. Williamson pointed out, "and cannot be circumvented by getting one satisfactory score on one test." To assure high test scores, some schools have actively discouraged certain students from taking the assessment tests, he added. Because the accreditation system will establish a minimum threshold for the number of students who take the test, schools will have to ensure that nearly all students participate in the assessment process. "Accreditation will be awarded or withheld on the basis of how a school met all standards. It will be more difficult," he said. "The new system could change the status of some schools."²⁷⁾

Estimates by the Department on how schools would place under the framework for a performance-based accreditation system, as outlined in its early development, indicated the following: 88 elementary and middle schools and 32 high schools would be summary accredited; 477 elementary and middle schools and 307 high schools would be accredited receiving recognition; 1,020 elementary and middle schools plus 213 high schools would be accredited with moderate performance; 511 elementary schools and 85 high schools would be unaccredited but improving; and, 388 elementary and middle schools, and an unknown number of high schools (due to the lack of progress measures) would be unaccredited.²⁸⁾

REACTION TO ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

In response to the performance-based accreditation system, a number of stakeholders in Michigan's educational community expressed support for an accountability system that would be meaningful to schools, parents, and State officials, but raised concerns about how continuous improvement would be assessed and measured. For example, some felt that the use of an adequate yearly progress formula was inappropriate for various reasons, including the random variation in MEAP scores due to different numbers of students taking the test yearly; the scores' inability to provide an accurate or comprehensive view of improvement; and, the lack of a meaningful translation of the formula to a teacher's daily work. The use of categories to measure growth was questioned on the ground that this type of measurement could mask progress because the detail of growth within categories would not be reported. It was recommended, instead, that growth should be viewed across a continuum of scale scores and not just as movement across arbitrarily defined cut scores.²⁹⁾

Another recommendation suggested that school districts should be permitted to include their own measures of progress. Thus, districts could submit a plan to determine student progress that used measures, other than MEAP, that still would hold schools to a standard specified by the State Board, such as alignment with State curriculum standards. School districts then could report their progress toward locally determined goals that would incorporate MEAP and additional approved measures. Regardless of the accreditation and accountability system that the State adopts, the stakeholders recommended that it use measures that are reliable and demonstrate an accurate picture of progress. In addition, it was suggested that the system not be used merely as a method of reporting and ranking schools.

In response to the development of a new accreditation model, a number of individuals within the State's educational community organized a task force on accountability. Task force members include representatives of the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB), the Michigan Association of School Administrators, the Michigan Education Association, the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, and the Middle Cities Association, as well as representatives of universities and other school groups.³⁰⁾

According to Brad Baltensperger, president of MASB, the State is ripe for developing a comprehensive accountability system that includes accreditation as part of the overall scheme. He suggests, however, that State and school leaders should be discussing school accountability, with school accreditation a component of that concept. "We are willing to be accountable, but we need a meaningful system," he said. "We need to look at the general concept on how an institution is held accountable on what it is supposed to do. Any accountability system is bigger than accreditation." Baltensperger added that while State law requires that schools be accredited, he is concerned that the MEAP test may be the core of the Department's accreditation system. The task force believes that accountability must look at multiple measures, and not at a single test. He suggests that other measures include attendance data, graduation and dropout rates, the quality of instruction in the classroom, a district's investment in teacher professional development, the alignment of curricula with established standards, and the percentage of students entering postgraduate education programs. An accountability plan cannot ignore these kinds of factors that affect student achievement, according to Baltensperger. "Rather than focus on a single numerical goal that every school must meet, we want to see a system developed that acknowledges the

multiplicity of factors that can influence student achievement and that more broadly define success,” he added.³¹⁾

As part of its continuing work, the task force is studying the concept of accountability and is reviewing the accountability models of other states. In North Carolina, for example, “gateway exams” are administered in mathematics and reading in the third, fifth, eighth, and 11th grades. Students also are given a writing assessment at the end of the fourth grade. Students who do not earn adequate scores or who have not met promotion requirements receive interventions to help them catch up in these subject areas. A local school district must report the results of these exams to the state Department of Public Instruction.³²⁾ (For an overview of accreditation policies in the states, see Appendix C.)

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

In light of the State Board’s adoption of a framework for accountability-based accreditation and the Department’s ongoing steps to implement the new accreditation system, strategies already undertaken to improve low-status schools may offer insight as to successful approaches to assist these kinds of schools in the future.

As noted earlier, the Achievement Group has worked with numerous school districts to provide technical assistance to meet the unique needs of interim and unaccredited schools. According to Linda Forward, director of the Achievement Group, a common trait among the unaccredited schools was that they served a large at-risk student population and were located primarily in large urban or isolated rural areas. The goals for these schools have been to: increase student achievement, assist schools in improving their accreditation status, develop a system to provide ongoing training, consulting, and technical assistance, implement ongoing school improvement planning, and establish “collaborative linkages to build school capacity”. An approach used to assist these schools included providing a coach or coaches to work with a school building’s staff in cooperation with staff from the school district. Persons serving as coaches have been specialists on the staff of the local intermediate school district or a retired teachers who were trained by the Achievement Group.³³⁾

Once a school was selected to receive technical assistance, a coach met with the principal and school improvement team to design a plan to provide support for the school. Data and the current school improvement plan were examined while the curriculum and instruction methods were reviewed in terms of the goals stated in the plan. A school district often assisted the school through meetings and support, with additional assistance provided as needed. The purpose of the meetings was to align district and school building efforts. After contacting the school building principal or district office to initiate the process, the coach worked with them to complete a joint analysis of the school’s status and the areas in which it wanted to concentrate improvement efforts based on student data. The coach and staff also collaborated to review and refine a school’s improvement plan to help the staff achieve the building’s goals and implement improvement strategies.

In working with schools, Ms. Forward said that the Achievement Group learned that student achievement increased when staff focused on student learning; schools developed and implemented a realistic school improvement plan; data were used to make changes in instruction; strategies were based on research and best practices; strategies were assessed frequently; curriculum and instruction were aligned with State standards; student learning

was evaluated continuously; a diverse group of parties was involved in the process; high expectations were set for students; strong leadership in the school existed; and, a team approach was used.³⁴⁾

In 1998, the Department reported that eight schools in the State were unaccredited. One year later, three previously unaccredited schools in the Beecher and Flint school districts earned an interim accreditation status under the previous accreditation system based on 1999 MEAP scores. Furthermore, five public school academies were unaccredited under that system based on 1999 MEAP scores. For many public school academies, 1999 was the first time that accreditation status could be determined because three years of MEAP scores were available for these schools.

For the purpose of this paper, school administrators who were involved in or familiar with improvement strategies implemented at the eight schools reported unaccredited in 1998, were contacted for their views about the effectiveness of the strategies described above. The following is a sample of their comments.

Beecher Community Schools/Summit Middle School: The school has reached interim accreditation status, according to Francine Edwards, interim superintendent, due to efforts by the Achievement Group and reading specialists in the district. Most notably, students' writing scores for the MEAP tests improved, which propelled the school into the interim accreditation status. Ms. Edwards said that work to bring about systemic change at the school is ongoing.³⁵⁾

Flint City School District/Holmes and Longfellow Middle Schools: In a cooperative effort, specialists from the Genesee Intermediate School District and the Achievement Group have worked with both schools, with Achievement Group coaching Longfellow and intermediate district staff concentrating on Holmes, and with the schools' improvement teams, according to Dr. William Shaw, education consultant for the Genesee Intermediate School District. In addition, the Flint school district is working with parents and community leaders to develop a student profile that will outline what a student in the Flint district needs to know to be successful for higher education or the work world. Embedded in the profile are standards that align with State benchmarks as reflected on the MEAP tests. In addition, the intermediate district is working with schools across the Flint district, including these two middle schools, to develop mock assessment tests that are similar to the MEAP tests to assess how well students perform on these kinds of tests. Subject area coordinators from the intermediate district also are working with the schools to develop strategies to help teachers focus instruction on State standards and benchmarks. Dr. Shaw also said that the Achievement Group coaches have worked with schools to analyze student performance on MEAP tests and to develop strategies to show improvement.³⁶⁾

Grand Rapids Public Schools/Iroquois Middle School: The school has been reconstituted with the appointment of a new principal and the commitment of faculty to implement major change strategies, according to Odette Redd, district coordinator of school improvement and personnel development. Successful cooperative efforts among the school, the local district, the intermediate district, and State technical advisors allowed school staff to design the necessary training and required them to be held accountable. Top-down directives from the intermediate district to the local school that did not involve local school personnel in the planning and implementation were not effective, she said. State technical assistance was

welcomed, but there were concerns about continuity in the availability of State support and funds.³⁷⁾

Highland Park City Schools/Highland Park Community Junior High School: The school administration and staff have worked with representatives of the Achievement Group, the Department of Education, and the Wayne County Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) to develop improvement plans, according to John Stindt, assistant superintendent of curriculum. Various training programs, in such areas as goal-setting and team-building, were conducted. Teacher professional development involved curriculum specialists who served as master teachers and instructional models. Curriculum was aligned with State standards and benchmarks. Efforts by the school and district, such as Wayne State University faculty assisting teachers to develop methods for effective reading instruction, augmented assistance from the State.³⁸⁾

Muskegon City Schools/Steele Middle School: The superintendent and the school's administrators, faculty, and staff worked with the Achievement Group and found the arrangement to be beneficial. Improvement efforts involving the Kalamazoo County RESA that excluded input from the school's staff, however, were viewed as not effective, said Martha Hall, assistant superintendent. Funneling assistance from the State through a regional agency, to an intermediate school district, and finally to the local school was not productive, she concluded. The school benefitted from intervention by the district's curriculum and instructional experts.³⁹⁾

PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS

The approach used by the State to provide technical assistance to low-performing schools may be changing in the near future. The State School Aid Act appropriates in FY 2002-03 \$10 million for technical assistance for school accreditation purposes. The funds reportedly will be used to implement a new program of intervention for low-status schools. In April 2000, the State Board of Education adopted a policy that expands technical assistance and intervention for low-performing schools, to be provided in a new program entitled "Partnership for Success". "Careful design of target intervention in persistently low performing schools has been a continuing concern of the Michigan Department of Education, however, the strategies available have not been effective enough to result in sufficient learning for all students," State Superintendent Art Ellis said in a memorandum to the Board. "Services provided to failing schools have often replicated the services provided all schools to support them in efforts to strengthen professional practice. Also, training was often targeted at raising a test score and gave little focus toward support for the fundamental system changes that might foster sustained success within the school."⁴⁰⁾

Under the plan, partners will be recruited from skilled educators, including teachers and principals who have demonstrated success in critical components of school improvement. The Department will contract with a partner to assure continuation of regular pay and benefits, and will pay a bonus directly to each partner. Client schools will be identified from among schools demonstrating very low test scores, persistent gaps in achievement, and/or lack of satisfactory progress for three years, as indicated by accreditation. Before a partner is assigned, a school will be evaluated to determine barriers to learning. Each client school will form a leadership team, whose composition is yet to be determined. Team members will be trained to assist in making changes based on the school's specific barriers and learning

environments. The partner, who will receive intensive training, will serve as an expert resource to the school leadership team, a catalyst in the change process, and a facilitator.

The effectiveness of the partnership will be measured by the degree to which participating schools demonstrate increases in student achievement and adequate yearly progress, make strides in closing the achievement gap, demonstrate a collaborative climate focused on pupil performance, and increase parent satisfaction. Ellis pointed out that research shows that a school may need three to five years to institutionalize change and increase student learning. While some schools will be able to develop quickly and maintain the change process, others may need a more extended partnership. At the outset, the Department will limit the program to 10 schools in order to perfect it and allow for the demonstration of improvement after the first year. Once the program is completely operational, it is expected to serve 90 buildings at a time, with 30 schools in the first year and 30 in each subsequent year. The program is expected to spend approximately \$300,000 per school, per year.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that State policy-makers and practitioners in Michigan's educational community have been concerned about the current method of accrediting schools. In 1999, the State Board of Education approved a new framework for performance-based accreditation. This sparked a debate among stakeholders in the educational community as to the implications of the framework for schools already accredited by the State, future performance expectations, and the larger issue of school accountability. Thus, as Department officials proceed with implementing the new performance-based system, discussions continue among State education leaders, including representatives of the Department, about the effects of the new process on schools and how they are to be held accountable. While it is not certain where these discussions will lead, it is clear that implementation of the new system is under way. In addition, it appears that increased funding for technical assistance for school accreditation, as reflected in the State School Aid Act, signals a possible change in the approach used to help unaccredited and low-performing schools. Consequently, this may necessitate amendments to the Revised School Code's provisions on accreditation in order to accommodate the new accreditation system.

APPENDIX A

Annual Education Report

The Revised School Code provides that, in addition to meeting the requirements for accreditation, if a school board wants all of its schools to be accredited, the board must prepare and submit an annual educational report. The report must be submitted to the State Board of Education by September 1 of each year and be distributed to the public at an open meeting by October 15 of each year.

The report must include all of the following information for each public school in the school district: the accreditation status; the status of the three- to five-year school improvement plan; a copy of the core academic curriculum and a description of its implementation; a report of aggregate student achievement based on Statewide assessment tests or locally administered student competency tests of nationally normed achievement tests; the district pupil retention report as defined in the State School Aid Act; and, the number and percentage of parents, legal guardians, or persons in loco parentis who participate in parent-teacher conferences for their students. If the school is a high school, it also must report on the following: the number and percentage of pupils enrolled in the preceding school year in a postsecondary course; the number of college-level equivalent courses offered to pupils enrolled in the school; the number and percentage of pupils who were enrolled in at least one college-level equivalent course; and, the number of pupils who took a college-level equivalent credit examination as well as the number who achieved a score that was above the recommended level.

School Improvement Plan

The Revised School Code also provides that if a school board wants all of its schools to be accredited, it must adopt and implement by September 1 each year a three- to five-year school improvement plan and continuing school improvement process for each school in the district. The school improvement plans must include a mission statement, goals based on academic objectives for all students, curriculum alignment corresponding with those goals, evaluation processes, staff development, development and use of community resources and volunteers, the role of adult and community education, libraries and community colleges in the learning community, and building-level decision-making. School improvement plans also must include goals centered on student academic learning, strategies to accomplish these goals, and an evaluation of the plan.

Core Academic Curriculum

A school board that wants all of the schools in the district to be accredited is required under the Revised School Code to provide a core academic curriculum, based on content standards that are developed by the State Board. The content standards must set forth desired learning objectives in mathematics, science, reading, history, geography, economics, American government, and writing, and they must be based on the "Michigan K-12 program standards of quality" to ensure that high academic standards, academic skills, and academic subject matters are built into the instructional goals of all school districts for all children.

The State Board approved in 1995 content standards for English/language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies. One year later, high school tests were developed to assess the implementation of the model core curriculum. Mathematics and science assessments are to be implemented in 2002 to assess content standards and benchmarks, with English/language arts assessments to follow.

APPENDIX B

Accreditation Standards

In accordance with the Revised School Code, the Department of Education is required to distribute to all public schools standards for determining whether a school is eligible for summary accreditation. If the Department determines that a school has met the standards for summary accreditation, the school is considered to be accredited without undergoing a building-level evaluation. If the school has not met these standards, but is progressing toward meeting them, the school is in interim status. If a school has not met the standards and is not eligible for interim status, the school is unaccredited.

Accreditation Standards Report

To determine whether public schools have met the State's standards and requirements for accreditation, the Department has distributed an Accreditation Standards Report in which schools must respond to questions concerning school program and school operations. Based on the requirements of Public Act 25 of 1990 and Public Act 335 and 339 of 1993, the accreditation standards report asks questions about a school's program and operation, to which a school must reply in the affirmative or the negative.⁴¹⁾

Annual Education Report: The accreditation standards report seeks information on whether a school's annual education report contains information on the following: the school's accreditation status, the status of the school improvement plan; a description of how the core curriculum is being implemented; aggregate and desegregated student achievement data; pupil retention data; parent conference participation; a comparison of the above information with comparable information from the previous year; any gender equity issues that have been or are being addressed in the school improvement plan; and, the adoption and implementation of a three- to five-year school improvement plan.

School Improvement Plan: The accreditation standards report asks whether a plan contains the following: a mission statement; goals based on academic outcomes for all students; information regarding how a school's curriculum is being aligned with the goals; evaluation processes; a professional development plan; information on how community resources and volunteers are being developed and used as part of a school improvement process; the role of adult and community education; libraries and community colleges in a school's learning community; a description of the decision-making process used in the school; a description of the adult roles for which graduates will need to be prepared; and, identified skills and education that are needed to enable graduates to fulfill these adult roles. Schools also must indicate whether their improvement plans include: an assessment of whether the existing curriculum is providing students with these skills and education; development of authentic assessments; methods for the effective use of technology as a way of improving learning and the delivery of services; methods for the integration of evolving technology in the curriculum; information on how opportunities for on-the-job learning are/will be combined with classroom instruction; a core academic curriculum that is designed and being implemented for all students; realistic opportunities for all students to learn all subjects and courses required by the core curriculum; and, whether all students who did not score satisfactory on the fourth and seventh grade MEAP reading test are provided with special assistance to read at grade level within 12 months, excluding those students placed in special education, students with learning disabilities, and students with extenuating circumstances.

The Purposes of the School: A school must reply “yes” or “no” to the following: The school’s philosophy, mission, and student outcomes are aligned with the district’s philosophy, mission, and student outcomes; these statements are based on research and other information that define the current and future needs of students and society; all students are expected to attain the broad student outcomes; the organization and administration of a school or district act on the belief that all students can achieve the desired student outcomes, and they reflect a common understanding of the desired student outcomes; the building and staff understand the desired student outcomes, believe that these outcomes can be accomplished by all students, and act on the belief that all students can achieve the desired outcomes; and, parents and community members understand the desired student outcomes and believe that all students can achieve them.

The School Improvement Process: The report asks whether: staff, students, parents, and community members have participated in developing the school’s philosophy, mission, and student outcomes; the building staff demonstrate an understanding of and participate in the school improvement process; the organization and administration of a school or district coordinate programs on school improvement, core curriculum, accreditation, and the annual education reports; and, parents and community members understand the progress being made toward the achievement of the desired student outcomes.

Assessment/Evaluation: Schools must report whether: the school improvement plan includes a design to assess student performance regularly; assessment data are used in the development of long-range objectives and workable solutions for the improvement of student outcomes; a school’s instructional practices use appropriate and alternative assessment strategies to measure student progress toward identified outcomes; the instructional practices of the school regularly provide feedback on students’ progress to students and parents; a school’s instructional practices use evidence of impact on student outcomes to select instructional materials; the organization and administration of a school/district collect and disseminate ongoing assessment of student achievement for evaluating program strengths and concerns; the building staff participate in the assessment of student achievement; parents and the community participate in the assessment of the educational program’s strengths and weaknesses; a school’s facilities and equipment are evaluated for their effectiveness in the achievement of student outcomes; the school improvement plan is based on sound evaluation practice and has an evaluation component of the educational program that is ongoing, programmatic, systemic, and formative.

Professional Development: Schools are asked whether: the school improvement plan provides continuous professional development opportunities that allow staff to design, choose, use, and evaluate teaching and learning strategies; a comprehensive professional development plan supports the curriculum; the organization of a school and district provide training resources for all employees; the building staff collaboratively plan and participate in a professional development program that is designed to enhance their skills, and they use professional development time and other resources to identify and implement school improvement strategies; and, school facilities and equipment are available for staff development activities.

Decision-Making in the School: Schools must report whether: the school improvement plan was developed and implemented through building-level decision-making that involves all stakeholders in the school and community; the plan incorporates information on best practice, current research, and knowledge about the school improvement process; the school’s

instructional practices are developed using appropriate input from interested parties in the school and community; the organization and administration of the school and district include consensus decision-making and collaborative problem-solving in critical instructional decisions; the building staff participated in the development of student outcomes, in decisions about the choice, use and evaluation of teaching and learning resources, and in the decision-making committees of the school and district; and parents and community members participated in the development of broad-based student outcomes, the development of workable solutions to improve student outcomes, school and district decision-making committees, and in the school program.

The Curriculum: Schools are asked whether: the curriculum is written in desired student outcomes, reflecting a multicultural core curriculum and a gender-fair core curriculum for all students; the curriculum includes an extended curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all students, is based on research and best practice, emphasizes the interrelationships among the curricular areas, and is developed and evaluated systematically to encourage ongoing revision and improvement; the curriculum provides special instructional services and/or materials to meet students' unique needs; includes co-curricular and extracurricular activities on an equitable basis for all students; and, provides instruction in the ability to locate, analyze, organize, and evaluate information.

School Resources and Facilities: The report asks whether: the organization and administration of the school and district use district policies and building-level practices that are based on successful evidence from research and best practice, provide sufficient staff and resources to implement the curriculum in an orderly and efficient manner, and establish policies and procedures that provide adequate time and resources to support the instructional program; parents and community members provide the necessary resources for student success, background experiences to assist students to enter the school program successfully, and link other community services and institutions to the importance of each student's success; the school facilities and equipment are designed, modified, and used on an understanding of the desired student outcomes through a collaborative process that includes all interested parties; school facilities and equipment provide the following: appropriate conditions for teaching and learning for all students, a safe and secure environment for all students, a barrier-free environment for all students, and, opportunities for including new technologies and innovations with teaching/learning styles; and, the school facilities and equipment are available for co-curricular activities and community activities.

Instructional Practice: A school must report whether its instructional practices reflect a common understanding of the broad student outcomes and the belief that all students can achieve the desired outcomes; are designed to meet the diverse needs of students; and incorporate the use of community resources and support innovation to improve teaching and learning.

APPENDIX C

Accreditation Policies in Other States

While all states assess the performance of their public schools, not all require that their schools be accredited as having met certain predetermined standards, such as student achievement in a performance-based accreditation system.

According to the Education Commission of the States, state accreditation policies range from state performance-based accreditation to voluntary accreditation obtained through a regional accreditation association. Currently, there are six regional accrediting associations that are nonprofit, nongovernmental agencies recognized for their concern about the quality of education being offered by schools. While 30 states have established state accreditation systems, many schools in states without accreditation systems obtain accreditation through the regional accreditation associations.

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) is a nongovernmental voluntary membership association of educational institutions located in a 19-state region that includes the Navajo Nation and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. As a regional accrediting association, it is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. To become a member of the NCA, schools must demonstrate that they meet or exceed standards established for the more than 8,000 NCA-accredited schools across the country. Accreditation is granted one year at a time and is based on a school's meeting the association standards. Schools must complete an annual report, which indicates compliance, to the association each fall. In 1999, the NCA accredited 1,331 Michigan schools and 151 K-12 school districts.⁴²⁾ (Being accredited by the NCA does not mean that a school meets Michigan accreditation standards.)

The following is a brief overview of state accreditation policies, compiled from information gathered by the Education Commission of the States.⁴³⁾

Alabama: The state has established a state accreditation system, but schools may use the accreditation system of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The state's assessment program is based on student performance, but assessments are not tied to accreditation.

Alaska: The state board of education grants accreditation, which is not based on student performance.

Arizona: The state does not accredit its schools. It does use standardized essential skills testing to assess student achievement, and assessment plans are required at the district level. The state requires annual excellence report cards, which analyze test results and make comparisons between districts.

Arkansas: The state board of education develops regulations, criteria, and minimum accreditation standards. While the state has a comprehensive testing and assessment program, it is not tied to accreditation.

California: The state does not accredit schools but uses a statewide achievement assessment that uses information required in an annual statewide accountability report card program.

Colorado: The state board of education develops a statewide accreditation process that is based on student performance results.

Connecticut: The state does not accredit schools, but accreditation is determined through requirements set by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools.

Delaware: The state department of education develops an accreditation program based on student performance. Schools and school districts can be “superior accredited”, “accredited”, placed on “accreditation watch”, or nonaccredited. School and district profile reports are required annually and contain information on student achievement, educational outcomes, and accreditation status.

Florida: The state does not accredit schools. The state board of education approves student performance standards in program categories and grade levels. The student assessment program includes national and state comparisons and a standardized testing program.

Georgia: The state does not accredit schools. Instead, the state requires educational programs to be assessed for their effectiveness. Schools are accredited through the rules of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Hawaii: The state board of education establishes statewide performance standards and an assessment plan that measures success, but the state does not accredit schools. Districts must report on accountability based on student performance standards.

Idaho: The state requires all schools to be accredited, but accreditation is not performance-based. To achieve accreditation, schools may meet state accreditation standards, meet accreditation standards of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, meet the Idaho school improvement model, or submit an alternative accreditation model for state approval.

Illinois: The state requires all schools to be accredited. The accreditation process includes student performance and school improvement standards.

Indiana: The state requires schools to be accredited and provides for performance-based accreditation. No other system is permitted. Student performance standards and accreditation prerequisites are established in administrative rules.

Iowa: Schools must be accredited and the state board of education sets accreditation standards. While achievement goals and a needs assessment are required to address student performance, they are not required in accreditation standards.

Kansas: The “quality performance accreditation system” is established in Kansas law. The accreditation system includes student performance evaluation standards.

Kentucky: The state board of education is charged with creating and implementing a statewide assessment program that is student performance-based. The assessment program is designed to ensure school accountability for student achievement of educational goals. The state, however, does not require schools to be accredited.

Louisiana: The state superintendent of education develops and institutes a state accreditation system that is based on “pupil proficiency” criteria. This includes “referenced tests” standards for public schools that are based on the attainment of educational goals and objectives.

Maine: The state requires schools to be accredited and the state board of education adopts accreditation rules. While the state has an assessment plan that measures student academic achievement, the achievement of content standards, and learning results, this system is not related to accreditation.

Maryland: The state board of education, with assistance from the state superintendent, adopts rules for the accreditation of all public schools. State accreditation standards include the state education accountability program, which contains testing and measurement standards that are based on student performance.

Minnesota: While there is no statewide accreditation, the state board of education may recognize accreditation agencies for the evaluation of general attendance and curriculum issues. The state has a student testing and reporting system for assessment and a graduation standards rule. The commissioner of education is required to establish a comprehensive plan for improving educational effectiveness.

Mississippi: The state requires that schools be accredited on the basis of performance. Specifically, the state board of education and the commission on school accreditation establish and implement performance-based accreditation standards.

Missouri: The state board of education establishes regulations for the required accreditation of schools. The state also has created a statewide assessment system to monitor student performance, but this is not directly related to accreditation.

Montana: All schools are required to be accredited, and their accreditation status is reviewed annually. The state’s board of public education adopts standards with the recommendation of the superintendent of public instruction.

Nebraska: A state commission on school accreditation and the state board of education establish and implement performance-based accreditation standards for all public schools. All schools were to be accredited by the 1993-94 school year.

Nevada: There is no statewide accreditation of schools. Each local school board implements an accountability program based in part on student performance on standardized tests conducted in grades 4, 8, 10, and 11. Annual reports are required.

New Hampshire: While there is a statewide education improvement and assessment program, it does not require accreditation. The assessment program is based on student performance, but minimum competency testing is not required.

New Jersey: School report cards and efficiency programs are used to evaluate schools, but there is no state-required accreditation of schools. The evaluation of school performance is based on student needs, progress, and curriculum content standards. Assessments include student performance measures, and graduation requirements.

New Mexico: The state board of education accredits schools, but accreditation is not mandatory. Required subjects by grade level are included in the accreditation standards. The state board of education assesses and evaluates all schools that want to be accredited. An annual school accountability report, which measures student performance, is required. The department of education conducts on-site accreditation visits, which include review of student performance standards.

New York: The board of regents of the University of New York is required to provide the governor and the legislature with an annual report about student achievement and performance. While there is no required statewide accreditation, schools may seek accreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

North Carolina: The state's accreditation and basic education program creates a school-based management and accountability program. The accreditation system requires school "report cards" based on student performance.

North Dakota: The superintendent of public instruction may adopt accreditation standards, but compliance is not mandatory. Any school that meets the standards is considered an accredited school.

Ohio: The state does not require accreditation, but the state board of education determines standards for defining indicators to establish levels of school district and individual school performance. Proficiency tests are administered to students. School districts may seek accreditation through accreditation associations.

Oklahoma: The state board of education establishes rules for statewide accreditation. The standards must meet or exceed the accreditation standards of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and must use an academic results-oriented approach.

Oregon: The state does not require accreditation, but schools must assess learning rates. The state's assessment system, which is based on student performance, can result in the issuance of a "certificate of initial mastery" for students who complete the 10th grade.

Pennsylvania: While the state does not require its schools to be accredited, it has established an annual school assessment and accountability plan based on the performance of students, teachers, schools, and school districts.

Rhode Island: Accreditation by the state is voluntary for secondary schools and is qualitative, but not performance-based. Schools may choose to be accredited by the state and/or by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools.

South Carolina: The state accredits schools through the state department of education, which establishes a plan for the accountability and accreditation of all schools. Included in the plan are a basic educational data system accreditation process and minimum accreditation procedures.

South Dakota: The state accredits schools through rules and policies of the state board of education. These rules and policies establish standards for the classification and accreditation of all public schools. State accreditation, however, is not performance-based.

Tennessee: Although the state does not accredit schools, they still must meet performance goals and assessment requirements. The assessment system uses a “value added assessment model”, which is a statistical model whose provisions for its use are included in legislation.

Texas: The state accredits schools through the state department of education, which implements the accreditation system and establishes accreditation levels for each school.

Utah: School accreditation is voluntary and is administered by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. Elementary, junior high, and middle schools can elect accreditation under separate rules.

Vermont: Accreditation of schools is voluntary. Schools that want to be accredited may do so through the New England Association of Colleges and Schools. Schools also can be assessed under the state’s effective schools assessment plan or under alternatives developed by the state department of education.

Virginia: The state accredits schools through the state board of education. Standards are based on performance.

Washington: The state board of education accredits schools for the state. Schools also have the option of obtaining accreditation through the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. School self-studies also are required.

West Virginia: The state board of education implements guidelines for the required performance-based accreditation system. Schools can obtain the following accreditation status: full, temporary, conditional, or seriously impaired. County school board school systems also may be accredited.

Wisconsin: The state does not accredit schools, but it conducts student assessments in grades 4, 8, and 10. The state also has established high school graduation requirements.

Wyoming: The state department of education establishes the performance-based accreditation system. Evaluation of each school results in a district’s being assigned an accreditation level, which can be “full without follow up”, “full with follow up”, and “conditional”.

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